

Today I broke the law... I picked kernels of wheat and ate them as I walked through the field. It was Saturday.

Had the Pharisees caught me I'd have been reprimanded, "Why are you doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?"

The amber waves of grain were blowing in the wind over the hundred-acre field behind our home. It's a beautiful site looking at the golden stalks of wheat ready for harvest and walking through the field and seeing the grains of wheat up close. There's something entrancing about the whole scene.



On another Sabbath, 2,000 years ago, Jesus and his disciples were hungry as they were walking through the fields. There were no restaurants and fast food joints along their path. They walked through a field of grain and picked the heads of grain eating them along the way. We're told this story in Matthew, Mark and Luke.

"One Sabbath [Jesus] was going through the grain fields and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. And the Pharisees said to him, 'Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the

Sabbath?' ... And [Jesus] said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath; so the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.'" (Mark 2:23-24, 27-28).

What's the big deal? High crimes and misdemeanors? According to the Pharisees this action was classified as "work" and was a violation of the Law of Moses. The Mosaic Law forbid working on the Sabbath. But how does one define



“work”?

While slaves In Egypt, the Israelites had to work seven days a week and had no day of rest. Can you imagine working as a slave from sun up to sun down, seven days a week without ever having a day off? Now THAT was work!

The 3rd commandment to keep the Sabbath day holy was not to be laborious, burdensome or difficult. It was not to be tedious or a maze full of traps. It was to be a blessing!



The law against work on the Sabbath was actually to be liberating. It was a way of God saying, “Unlike your slave masters in Egypt, I am a more merciful Lord and Master. I am going to *require* you to take one day a week off. In fact, (and my guess is God said this with a smile on his face), I’m going to demand that you sleep in, take time with your family, time for worship, rest and relaxation.”

But the Law was serious business. Moses told the people that if they obeyed the Law they would always be the head and never the tail and one from among their own people would rule over them (Duet 28). The opposite would be true if they neglected the Law. Blessings and curses!

Looking at it one way, the Pharisees were not such bad guys. They were only trying to call the Israelites back to a very fastidious and detailed obedience to the Law. If they can get Israel to follow God’s Law again maybe they could kick the Romans out of their country and they can again be in charge with their own king like they had been in the past.

But the Pharisees were hypocrites. Jesus exposed that over and over again.



What God had planned as a wonderful day of rest for family and worship, the Pharisees turned into a massive list of laborious, tedious and impossible rules. Forbidding work on the Sabbath was to give people freedom — not to turn them into slaves again bound by a million details of minutia from which they would be condemned every time they blinked.

The Pharisees turned God's freedom into bondage again. This is why Jesus tweaked and mocked them in public. Jesus said the Sabbath was made for man, not man to be slaves of the Sabbath. We must remember this when we are required to keep Sundays as a day of rest (CCC 2172).

“The institution of Sunday helps all ‘to be allowed sufficient rest and leisure to cultivate their familial, cultural, social, and religious lives’” (CCC 2194).

Let us not fall into either error: the legalism of the Pharisees nor the flaunting of libertarians, but let us realize *what* our Christian day of rest is for and thank God for the day that we can spend with families, to rest, to worship God--and even to sleep in once in a while :-)

So today I walked through the hundred-acre field of wheat and smiled as I picked the grain and chewed on it — as I meditated on the history of salvation, the words of our Lord Jesus and the teaching of the Catholic Church.

